

Friis, John

From: Susan Papa [schatzd2.lab@yale.edu]
Sent: Saturday, March 14, 2009 4:13 PM
To: Friis, John
Cc: Peg Sullivan
Subject: ACES-ECA interdistrict arts magnet school

An Open Letter to the Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee:

We are voters, educators, and parents of a 9th grader at Area Cooperative Education Services' Educational Center for the Arts (ACES-ECA, also called ECA), a public interdistrict arts magnet school in New Haven enrolling approximately 300 students from 23 school districts spanning 30 towns and 4 counties. Students attend their town's high schools each morning to fulfill their traditional academic requirements, and then study visual art, drama, dance, music, or writing at ECA four afternoons per week.

We oppose the Commissioner of Education's proposal to require teaching certification for the university instructors and arts professionals who comprise ECA's dedicated, stable faculty. This highly qualified faculty is largely responsible for our school's 35-year record of success, including a graduation rate significantly higher than the Connecticut average. Their professional training is the bedrock of the advanced, specialized arts education that defines ECA. To expect these instructors to invest the considerable time, training, and expense necessary to attain CT certification is unrealistic, especially since they are part-time, do not receive benefits, and already are experienced teachers.

Consider this: Certified teachers typically lack our faculty's combination of arts credentials and advanced degrees. If our existing faculty is driven away by a certification requirement, who, if anyone, will be qualified to take their place? The likely result of the Commissioner's proposal is that our model school will close.

Nicholas Kristof's Feb. 14, 2009, *New York Times* column on education could have been penned about ECA:

"Good teachers matter more than anything; they are astonishingly important."

"The latest Department of Education study, published this month, showed again that there is no correlation between teacher certification and teacher effectiveness."

"One study after another has concluded that it is time to relax teacher certification requirements."

"'Barriers to entry are too high,' declared last month's final report of the Teaching Commission, a private blue-ribbon panel led by Louis Gerstner, the former I.B.M. chief. 'Confusing and cumbersome procedures discourage many talented would-be teachers from entering the classroom.'"

"A white paper from the Hamilton Project of the Brookings Institution urged, 'Rather than dig further down in the pool of those willing to consider teacher certification programs or raise class sizes, we need to expand the pool of those eligible to teach.'"

In a time of staggering educational gaps, ECA's high expectations yield excellent results. In a time of struggling public schools, ECA offers an acclaimed, rigorous education. In a time of calls for regionalization, ECA unites students from cities, suburbs, and small towns. And though Connecticut's strongest students too often sit bored in their classrooms, ECA brings youth and their talents vibrantly to life.

If it ain't broke

Sincerely yours,

Susan L. Papa and David G. Schatz
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